The Scheduled Expiration in Check
Are we winning the Right to Repair?

Assignment Summary:

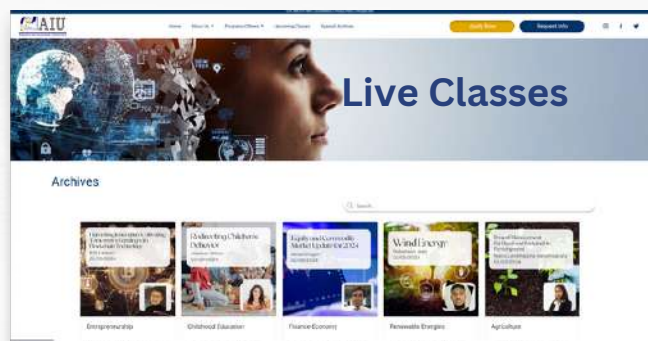*Do we really own what we buy if we can't repair it?*

The global Right to Repair movement is transforming the relationship between consumers, technology, and sustainability. This initiative seeks to guarantee access to tools, parts, and manuals that allow us to fix our own devices. Understanding this shift not only empowers us, but also invites us to reflect on the future we are building with our daily decisions.

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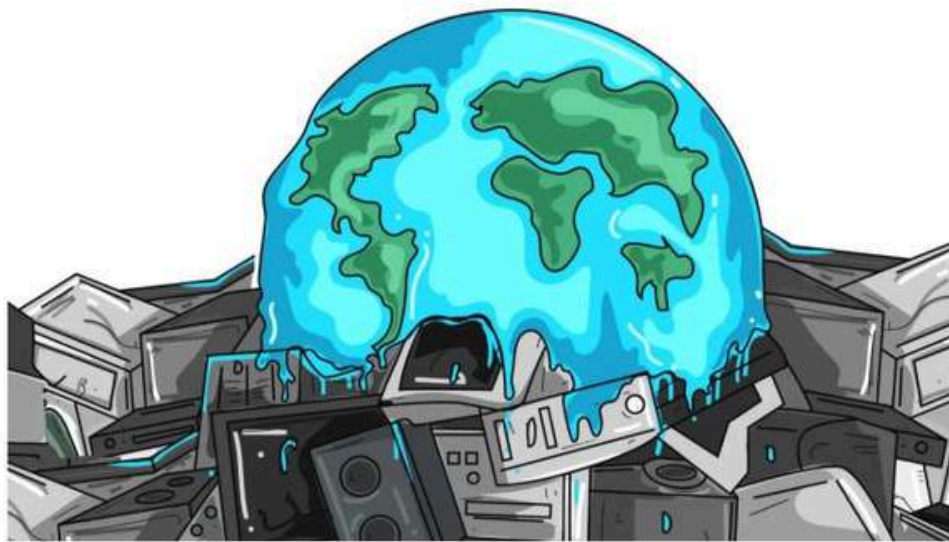
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A new attitude toward consumption and economic responsibility is increasingly driving the trend that empowers consumers' Right to Repair against large corporations.

This movement stems from the consumer and impacts technology and sustainability, while also challenging our perceptions of autonomy, corporate responsibility, and innovation.

What is the "Right to Repair"?

As the years go by, we see how, with the advancement of technology, we have lost the ability to repair objects. Durability is increasingly in question, and we are constantly having to discard things to buy new ones.

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Against this background, the "Right to Repair" emerges. It is nothing more than a return to basics, granting every consumer access to the tools, spare parts, and documentation necessary to repair the products they own.

A crusade against planned obsolescence and the repair restrictions that, for years, have left consumers dependent on manufacturers.

Not only because of the unnecessary need to constantly replace products that are in good condition, but also because of an urgent call to address sustainability and the waste we are causing by shortening the useful life of electronics.

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How has the concept of "ownership" evolved?

In the past, when purchasing or owning something, it was implicit to have complete control over the product, but with the advancement of technology, this idea has "evolved," making it increasingly difficult to use, modify, and repair without the assistance of the product or brand.

An example of this is seen, above all, in electronic devices, from smartphones to vehicles, which come with software restrictions or sealed hardware that make them extremely difficult to repair without specialized intervention. Many applications even stop working on devices due to software obsolescence, even though the device itself works perfectly.

At this point, the question arises: if we can't repair our devices, do we really own them? Faced with this situation, consumers have begun to take legal action and apply pressure, seeking a solution that protects them, challenging this model that leaves the useful life of products in the hands of large corporations. To illustrate the above idea, we can cite how in 2021, President Biden (USA) signed an executive order to promote competition throughout the economy, which included measures supporting the Right to Repair.

Meanwhile, in Europe, he has also introduced regulations requiring manufacturers to guarantee the availability of spare parts and the possibility of repair for a period after purchase.

These actions have empowered consumers, changing their role in the product lifecycle from being mere passive users to seeking active participation in sustainability and innovation.

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What is the impact of planned expiration on sustainability?

While the Right to Repair represents savings, one of the main impacts and motivations of the Right to Repair is environmental responsibility. E-waste is growing at an alarming rate, with millions of tons discarded each year. At the time of disposal, most products are still functional but are discarded because repair is inaccessible or uneconomical. Not to mention the growing consumer demand, which drives people to change devices simply because a new version is available, rather than because of a real need for a replacement.

In their awakening, consumers have realized that having the ability to repair their devices extends their useful life and reduces waste generation.

This is how this interest intersects with the circular economy, where products are designed considering their entire life cycle, driving companies to create goods that are not only advanced but also durable and repairable.

As an example to illustrate the above idea, we can use Fairphone, a Dutch company that designs modular, easy-to-repair phones. Its approach demonstrates that it is possible to manufacture ethically and sustainably, and that it is also a viable business strategy.

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The Right to Repair vs. Intellectual Property?

Opponents of the Right to Repair argue that allowing third-party repairs could compromise intellectual property or create safety issues. While these concerns are valid, they can be addressed through appropriate regulations and design standards.

Indeed, it is argued that limiting access to repair can stifle innovation, as many technological breakthroughs have emerged from individuals and small businesses experimenting, improving, or adapting existing technologies. By restricting devices, this creative spirit is also limited.

Furthermore, the repair ecosystem represents an opportunity for innovation. Businesses focused on refurbishing, upgrading, or servicing products can emerge, creating jobs and strengthening local economies.

Education and Empowerment

At its core, the Right to Repair is about empowerment. It teaches technical literacy, ingenuity, and independence. When people can fix what they own, they not only learn how things work, but also how systems can be improved.

Educational institutions and online communities already offer resources to foster this knowledge. iFixit, for example, provides free repair manuals for thousands of devices. These platforms not only support the practical aspect of repair but also cultivate a culture of learning and resilience.
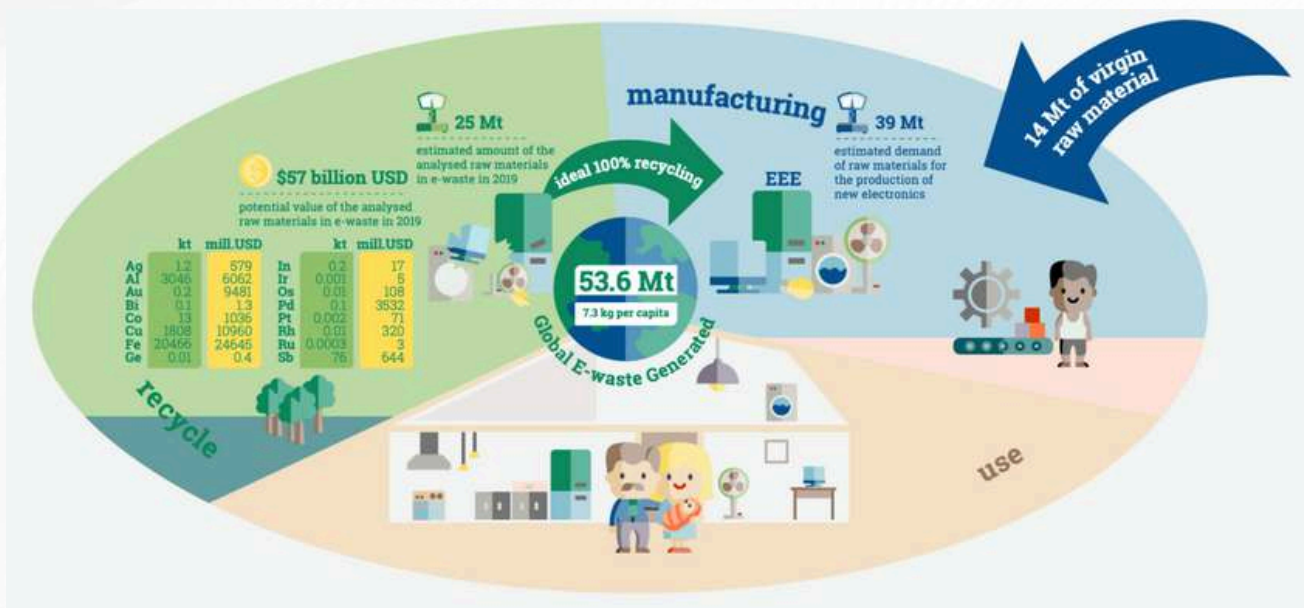
Education is vital, as it's not just about teaching or learning how to repair; it's about creating a level of awareness that allows for questioning, exploring, and building new things.

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How is the Right to Repair movement advancing around the world?

Little by little, the movement is gaining ground around the world, and we see that in France, electronic products are now required to include a "repairability index" that rates how easily they can be repaired.

In the US, states like New York have passed laws requiring companies to provide spare parts and manuals.

Source: Global E-Waste

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Perhaps when reading about programmed expiration, our cell phone or computer comes to mind, but given the implication of technology in our daily lives, almost every segment of our lives is affected.

An example that helps illustrate the situation is the case of John Deere tractors.

For years, farmers complained that they couldn't repair their own equipment due to software crashes. After a vigorous campaign, Deere announced in 2023 that it would allow wider access to tools and manuals. This represents a significant victory for consumers and demonstrates that public pressure can generate corporate change.

How can we become more involved in repairability?

The first step is to be aware that as consumers, we have rights. We must understand that caring for and maintaining items for a longer period of time will allow us not only to save money, but also to protect the planet.

Be careful to buy good quality products—and ones you really need. When purchasing software or electronics, find out the brand's position on Expiration Dates and, if possible, seek to support companies that design products that are easy to repair.
Another very interesting idea, which could even become a hobby—even a paid one—is to learn basic repair skills and share them with the community. Currently, there are many local movements in which neighbors come together to repair products, supporting each other and sharing knowledge.

These everyday actions contribute to a cultural shift toward sustainability and resilience.

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Reflect on your relationship with technology, sustainability, and responsibility.

If you feel drawn to these ideas, we invite you to explore academic programs in Environmental Sciences, Sustainable Development, Public Policy, or Technological Innovation Management.

Related Resources

To further explore this topic, students can examine the following:

"The Circular Economy: A Wealth of Flows" by Ken Webster
"Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things" by William McDonough & Michael Braungart
Reports by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation on sustainable production
iFixit
Consumers Are Gaining the Right to Repair — Are You Ready?
Right to Repair Fights Electronic Manufacturers to Blocking Fix It Opportunities.
Establishing a Right to Repair.
Why don't companies want you to repair your stuff?
Right to repair: Commission introduces new consumer rights for easy and attractive repairs
4 things you need to know on the Right to Repair: a fundamental step towards sustainability in digitalisation
The right-to-repair movement is growing as wins stack up

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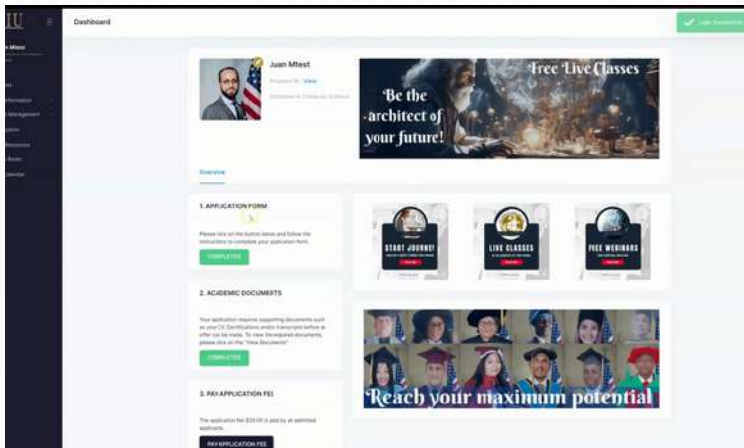
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